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SUBJECT: Tackling Illegal Fishing in Ghana

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¶1. Summary: The Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) Department under the Fisheries Commission is charged with combating illegal, unregulated, and underreported (IUU) fishing. A site visit to the port of Tema highlighted many enforcement challenges facing MCS notably the recent expiration of the company contract to place transponders on vessels. The recent discovery of oil offshore will also divert needed naval resources from MCS to combat IUU fishing. End Summary.

Political Transition: Impact on Ministry of Fisheries

¶2. The newly elected GOG moved the Ministry of Fisheries under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA). Formally, MoFA is the lead for policies governing fishing and aquaculture, but a Fisheries Commission is charged with drafting and implementing the policies. The commission is an inter-ministerial group of technical experts and overseas five departments: Marine Research, Marine Fisheries, Finance and Administration, Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS), and Aquaculture. Comment--Politically, this reorganization makes the director of Fisheries subject to the directives of the minister of MoFA regarding fisheries management.

Illegal, Unregulated, and Underreported (IUU) Fishing

¶3. The GOG is keenly aware of the economic cost that IUU fishing exacts from the national economy. In a briefing with the Director of MCS numerous measures against IUU fishing were addressed, including: placing transponders on all licensed Ghanaian vessels, limiting inputs through minimum mesh sizes, restricting use on non-selective gears, prohibiting the use of new vessels, sea observer programs with the Ghanaian Navy, and quayside inspection at the major ports of Tema, Sekondi and Takoradi.

¶4. IUU fishing also remains problematic at inland waterways especially at Lake Volta. Community Base Fisheries Management Committees have been used to combat this issue but there have been operational issues establishing them at the local levels and developing methods to resolve conflicts. These Community Committees as well as District Fisheries Management Committees represent a concerted attempt to decentralize fishery management to the local level.

Enforcement Challenges in the Port of Tema

¶5. Regional environmental officer and assistant visited the port of Tema to be briefed by quayside inspectors working for MCS. The port receives industrial, semi-industrial, and artisanal fishing vessels. The industrial fleet consists of trawlers and tuna boats. Pair trawlers were in the port but decommissioned. All vessels were Ghanaian-flagged and owned but crews were roughly 25 percent foreign and 75 percent Ghanaian. Typically, captains were foreign nationals with the trawlers headed by Chinese and the tuna boats by Koreans.

¶6. Numerous challenges were stated by the inspectors: an inability to detect illegal nets, a lack of observers on the trawlers, transponders on boats are no longer in use (company contract expired), unloading of fish at non-Ghanaian ports, especially Abidjan (this practice is illegal for Ghanaian-flagged vessels), selling of fish outside of the port to small artisanal boats, observers on board tuna boats only during the moratorium season, no insurance for inspectors, and a lack of political will to prosecute infractions when reports are submitted. Inspectors work from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM during the week; however, the port is open from 7 AM to 6 PM and on weekends allowing for ships to unload uninspected. Tuna boats were also seen carrying large hauls of bamboo which are used to aggregate the tuna to more easily catch. This is illegal under Ghanaian law and when the inspectors were pressed about this they said that the tuna are caught outside of Ghana's EEZ and therefore out of their jurisdiction.

Comment: Monitoring, Control and Surveillance in Ghana

¶7. While many regulations are in place under Ghanaian law to combat IUU, implementation remains a major challenge. Outside of the ports, limited MCS is conducted by the Ghanaian Navy using patrol boats and--until recently--monitoring via the transponders on board. With the recent discovery of off-shore oil, the Ghanaian Navy will focus its efforts on securing this new found resource and may further limit enforcement of IUU fishing. Also, artisanal fishermen often congregate near platforms and rigs, creating a hazard for them and for the platform equipment and operators.

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¶8. On the positive side, a sub-regional fisheries committee based in Tema, Ghana for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Togo, and Nigeria) aims to pool resources to conserve and sustainably manage biological marine resources, including a newly established IUU permanent working group.

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